

# Food Safety and You: FOOD AND WATER SAFETY AFTER FLOODING



Natural disasters such as flooding can be devastating, and the recovery work can be overwhelming. When you return to your home, make sure you assess all food and food preparation areas and equipment carefully.

## Food

### Throw away

Any food items that have or may have come in contact with floodwater must be thrown out, except undamaged, commercially canned food or retort pouches, which can be reconditioned.

- Food packed in plastic, paper, cardboard or similar containers that have been water-damaged should be thrown away.
- Food or beverages with screw caps, snap lids, twist caps, flip tops and home-canned foods, if they have come in contact with floodwater, should be thrown away.

### Keep

- Shelf-stable food items (nonperishable) that definitely have not been in contact with floodwater.

### Recondition undamaged commercially canned foods

- Remove the labels.
- Thoroughly wash the cans.
- Rinse the cans.
- Sanitize the cans (1 tablespoon of bleach per gallon of potable water).
- Air dry the cans.
- Relabel the cans with a marker.



## Water

### Best option

Bottled water that has not been exposed to flood waters.

### Tap water

Is the tap water safe to drink? Ask the local health department.

If the tap water is not safe to drink and you don't have safe bottled water available, you should purify some water.

#### Method 1: Boiling water (recommended)

- Boil the water for one minute, let it cool, and store it in clean containers with covers.
- If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle and draw off the clear water for boiling.

#### Method 2: Disinfect it using household bleach. Follow the guidelines and do not use more bleach than recommended.

- Add 1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops) of regular, unscented, liquid household bleach for each gallon of water, stir it well and let it stand for 30 minutes before you use it. Store disinfected water in clean containers with covers.
- If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle and draw off the clear water for disinfection.





## Clean up in the kitchen

### Wear

- Protective clothing, such as gloves, to avoid skin contact, irritation or infection.

### Discard

- Wooden cutting boards, wooden dishes and utensils, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples, and pacifiers that have come in contact with floodwater.

### Clean and sanitize equipment and surfaces

- Thoroughly wash with soapy water (use hot water if available).
- Rinse.
- Sanitize by boiling in clean water or immersing 15 minutes in sanitizers (1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water).
- Air dry.

## Clean up the appliances

### Dishwasher

- Run three empty full cycles to assure that the dishwasher is clean before you wash dishes in it.

### Refrigerator and freezer

- If the floodwater gets into the refrigerator, throw out food items and thoroughly clean and sanitize the refrigerator.
- If the power goes out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.
- Check your appliance thermometers. If the freezer thermometer reads 40 degrees F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. Discard any perishable food—such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers—that have been above 40 degrees F for two hours or more.

## References

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